Saltlight and Signatures
By Jonathan Olvera

It was another salty afternoon on the wooden floors of the southwest territory. The wind was dry and the sun unforgiving, casting long shadows over the white-crusted earth. The salt platforms shimmered, glowing like mirrors laid out by ancient hands. This was the kind of day where even time seemed to stop and think. A young man stood there, gazing across the basin. His name was Jonathan, though in whispered desert tongues they called him Aloe Vera. He had not always been free. Once, he had been chained in the belly of a ship—not for any crime, but for being an idea too dangerous to be free. The world around him was shaped by monarchs, empires, and spiritual conquest. Yet he escaped, fueled by a burning desire not only for personal autonomy but for the soul of a new people—an emerging nation not yet born, still being carved in sand, stone, and faith.

He journeyed through the lands, studying the structures of rule, bowing when necessary to learn how authority moved. He traded jewels and negotiated with tax collectors. He watched kings bleed peasants dry and swore to himself that he would never let a crown touch his soul. But when he suggested equality—when he dared to dream aloud—he was cast out, exiled to the desert. He did not perish. He built. Among stone, heat, and silence, Jonathan began to shape a voice. He forged rudimentary tools from scrap and silence, crafted devices to collect signatures—not for rebellion but for record. Not for blood, but for belief. And from those signatures came a kind of consensus, a new kind of currency. Loyalty measured in names. Faith measured in agreement. The Arizona Calculator, he called it. A device born not from ivory towers, but from toil and sunlight. It began as a way to track resource collection—gold, silver, luna, and Joe Rice, anything found in the land. But it grew into something greater. It recorded the movements of people, the rise of cattle, the passage of water and wind. It was a ledger of life, a conductor of order.

In this pre-industrial world, where monarchy still ruled and spiritual powers bent the hearts of empires, Jonathan became more than a worker. He became a founder. And yet he never stopped being a man of the people. One morning on the salt platform, Jonathan spoke with Charles, a man from Great Britain. They were discussing cattle, sacrifice, and the strange new crowds forming in the territory. “You eat meat?” Jonathan asked. “Yes, of course,” Charles replied. “Protein.” Jonathan nodded. “It could be a problem for us.” “I don’t see how. We do what we must.” “Oh goodness,” Jonathan sighed, half to himself. “Another day in the sacrifice.” He looked up toward the horizon. “What other blessings might be upon me?” “I guess I can see what you’re saying, old man,” Charles said with a grin. “I’m thankful for that,” Jonathan said, and they both chuckled softly.

As the day passed, Jewish men arrived from distant lands, carrying gold, sharing politics, debating over wine and salt. Some of the settlers voiced disgust, others curiosity. “I can tell you,” Jonathan said, “I pray every day. I make every effort to avoid mischief. Although it is a battle.” A man from an island settlement nearby asked the crowd, “Is anybody offended by my comments?” “I’m just surprised,” Jonathan replied. “The progress here—it’s fast. Almost too fast.” The sun dipped

behind the jagged cliffs, and the dark cover of night wrapped the town like a blanket. Jonathan returned to his small wooden cabin. He had been quartered there as part of a settlement agreement, given a special wage and a little corner of peace. Inside, he found familiar faces—men from the shipyard, others who had traveled with him through dust and danger. “Got a cigarette?” Jonathan asked. One man nodded. “If you’ve got a bottle.” Another laughed. “I drink the liquid.” “I drink wine as well,” Jonathan replied, smiling. “What is there to do today?” someone asked. “Drink a bottle, I suppose,” said another, raising his hand. “If it’s not too much worry to the men in green,” Jonathan muttered. A few men from Great Britain shared the space, settling in for their shift the next day.

A woman peeked into the cabin, red scarf over her head. “God bless,” she said softly. “And a greeting to recognize the night.” The sheriff passed by slowly, tipping his hat. “All mischief and all effort—visible or not—must now wait for morning.” Jonathan, never short on something to say, leaned forward. “Be patient,” he whispered. “That’s all we can do.” Another neighbor pointed across the platform. “Do you know that person?” “It is what I owe to be,” Jonathan said. “Honorable. Civil.”

The moon hung round and white in the black sky. Someone on the porch called out, “Hey y’all! Let’s head inside, come out early, find some work.” The morning came with light cracking across the sky. The sun was a hammer of gold. “Good day to you all,” Jonathan said, greeting the settlers. “How are you this morning?” “Terrible headache,” said one man. “It’s awful.” “Thing is,” Jonathan replied, “I have to travel soon. Got to check the elevation shifts with an explorer coming in from the east.” “You mean the one from China?” “Yes. Has he arrived?” “He went back, I think. May be a while before he returns.” “Well,” Jonathan said, “let me know if you see him.” He had his doubts about the day’s work and considered staying in a different cabin. The town was still forming—twelve cabins on one side, twelve on the other, all leading to a game room.

Jonathan entered the saloon. Cards shuffled in the background. “I don’t play much,” he said to a nearby man. “Would you like to hear a story?” the man asked. “I’ve got jokes.” Another whispered, “Do you like men or boys?” Jonathan responded with a dry smirk, “I like sacrifices.” The man pointed at the coins on the table. “That’s good. Because we have a king.” Jonathan raised his hands. “Repent ye, repent ye. The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He placed a fair nickel and a dime on the bar and ordered a simple drink.

“What else is there to do?” he asked the bartender. The man shrugged. “The church is for children. The temple’s for men.” A woman in a red dress passed by, rolling her eyes. “I tried,” she said. Another came from the bathroom, waving away the smell. “It stinks.” Suddenly, the room fell quiet as the Pharisees entered. Dignitaries from Jerusalem, robed and sacred, holding scrolls and polished boxes, stepped inside, their sandals silent on wood. Jonathan whispered, “Oh my Jerusalem. I’ve been saved by an angel.”

In the back of the saloon, a man in a green-striped suit was speaking softly into a microphone. “I’m listening,” he said. “It’s exhausting. I have a pounding headache. I’ve been cataloging everything—every item, every crate. I can’t tell anymore if it’s

a dead girl or a goat. It smells terrible in the cattle stockpile." His assistant shuffled papers. "And this?" "That's a moonstone," he answered. "Put it down for appraisal."

The banker returned that evening, dressed in black as always, with his mustache perfect and his gloves immaculate. "Young man," he said to Jonathan, "I've come to see what you've made." Jonathan handed over a schematic drawn in charcoal and red pencil. "The Arizona Calculator," he said. "Now tracking water location, livestock movement, and seismic changes. There's even sensitivity for medical use." The banker examined it closely. "This is remarkable. You truly believe this can shape a society?" "I don't just believe," Jonathan said. "I know. It already has. We're building consensus. Not with force—but with belief. With numbers. With trust." The banker nodded. "We will send this to the capital. Perhaps even further."

Later that night, Jonathan stood on the salt platform under a deep blue sky. He looked out across the crowd gathering in the dark, lanterns in hand, eyes bright with hope. He held a parchment, worn and weathered from sun and sweat. "I did not come here to be another servant of the crown," he declared. "I bowed once to understand its weight. Now I rise to bear my own. We will not trade stones for survival forever. We will build a law that does not bleed the poor. We will sign—not in blood—but in belief. One name after another, until this desert remembers: we were here. And we were free."

In the stillness that followed, the people knew something had begun. Not just a city. Not just a ledger. But a nation—etched in salt and signatures. Jonathan, born under three empires, raised in the fire of exile, baptized in sweat and sand, had counted his blessings. Not just the good ones. But the bitter ones. The painful ones. The ones that taught. He had once been chained for dreaming too loudly. Now he had built a place where people were free to believe.

And in that saltlight, as the stars blinked overhead and the cattle lowed in the distance, Jonathan raised his hand and whispered into the wind, "Another day. Another blessing. Count them all."